

WESTERN POTTER



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Cover Drawing by
Chuck Gardiner
K.S.A.

Instead of an editorial I am reprinting the following essay from "Tactile" with permission from Luke Lindoe. In his letter to me Mr. Lindoe said that "the message was particularly important to specific people in very particular times. I have waited for three years for the "particular" time when I felt that the cool, calm voice of Mr. Yanagi would help people on both sides of this particular fence." I feel I am one of the people for whom this essay is important-- and I, too, think there will be others.

Editor

Foreword

The Archie Bray Foundation, in Helena, Montana, is a non-profit, educational organization founded, in the words of Archie Bray, "to make available for all who are seriously and sincerely interested in any of the branches of the ceramic art, a fine place to work." The Bray family generously supported it from its beginning in 1951 until it became self-supporting in 1961. It is known, nationally and internationally, for its contribution to the ceramic arts. The following paper is one of two delivered by Dr. Soetsu Yanagi, late director of the Museum of Folk-Crafts in Tokyo, during his visit to the Foundation with the world renowned potters, Bernard Leach of St. Ives, England and Shoji Hamada of Mashiko, Japan, in December, 1952. Both papers, with Dr. Yanagi's gracious permission, were published by the Foundation that same year, but have now been out of print for some time. The Foundation is reissuing *Mystery of Beauty* because it seems too important a statement to be lost, and also because it is a way of again commemorating the visit of these three men to the Foundation. We would like to thank Professor Eugene Garber, of the University of Iowa, who was kind enough to correct a number of textual errors found in the first edition.

Mystery of Beauty

In South Korea stands the village Ampo, a lonely hamlet, remote from towns. To visit this village was a hope I had long cherished, for I had seen many examples of beautiful turnery (wood turning) 1.

made by the villagers. Nearly all Korean woodwork, especially turnery, suffers some deformity in its shape. But this slight crookedness always gives us a certain peculiar asymmetrical beauty, an indescribable charm that entices us into a sense of beauty that is free and unrestricted. From what source and by what means Korean craftsmen obtain such natural asymmetrical beauty had long been a question for me. In Japan we find also a great deal of turned works. Some are extremely good, made so precisely that they are almost perfect in shape. But their symmetrical perfection lacks the quality of unrestricted beauty. In turning there is an accepted rule that the wood used should be thoroughly dried; otherwise cracks will almost certainly appear. In Japan the wood is air dried for at least two or three years. This is common sense. In modern factories, of course, the drying is done quickly in kilns. In any case, all turnery should be produced from well dried wood. Fortunately, I was favored with a rare visit to that Korean village where those beautiful turned goods are made. I was excited by the opportunity of seeing these Korean craftsmen at work because I thought that I might grasp the mysterious beauty of their products. When I arrived after a long, hard trip I noticed at once beside their workshops many big blocks of pine ready to be lathed. To my great astonishment all of them were sap green and by no means ready for use. Imagine my surprise when a workman set one of these blocks in a lathe and began to turn it. The pine was so green that turning it produced a spray redolent of the scent of resin. This use of green wood perplexed me greatly, for it defies a basic rule of turnery. I asked the artisan, "Why do you use such green wood? Cracks will appear pretty soon." "What does it matter" was the calm answer. I was amazed by this Zen-monk-like response. I felt sweat on my forehead. Yet I dared to ask him, "How can we use something that leaks?" "Just mend it" was his simple answer. I was amazed to discover that these artisans mend their turnery so artistically and ingeniously that a cracked piece seems better than a perfect one. Consequently they do not care whether it is cracked or not. Our common sense is of no use to Koreans at all. They live in a world of "thusness", not of "must or must not." Their way of making things is so natural that man-made rules are meaningless to them. They are attached neither to the perfect piece nor to the imperfect. So it was that at this

moment when I received the artisan's unexpected answer I came to understand for the first time the mystery of the asymmetrical nature of Korean turnery. Because Korean artisans use green wood, their wares inevitably deform while drying. Therefore, this asymmetry is but a natural outcome of their state of mind, not the result of conscious choice. In short, their minds are free from any attachment to symmetry or asymmetry. The deformity of their work is the result of nonchalance, freedom from restriction. This explains why Japanese turnery looks hard and cold in comparison with Korean. We are attached to perfection, we want to make the perfect piece. But what is human perfection after all? In modern art, as everyone knows, the beauty of deformity is very often emphasized, insisted upon. But how different is Korean deformity. The former is produced deliberately, the latter naturally. Korean work is merely the natural result of the artisan's state of mind, which is free from dualistic man-made rules. He makes his asymmetrical turnery not because he regards the asymmetrical form beautiful or the symmetrical ugly but because, as he works, he is perfectly unaware of such polarities. He is quite free from conflict between the beautiful and the ugly. Here lies buried the mystery of the endless beauty of the Korean artisan's work. He simply makes what he makes, without pretension. It is very interesting to consider that the aim of the strenuous spiritual efforts of Zen monks is focused always on grasping "thusness" which is not yet separated into right and wrong, good and evil. The following story recorded in a book by a Zen monk will perhaps illustrate what I want to make clear. Once there were three people who took a walk in the country. They chanced to see a man standing on a hill. One of the three said, "I think he must be up there looking for stray cattle." "No," the second said, "I believe he is trying to find a lost friend." But the third said, "No, he is simply enjoying the summer breeze." Unable to reach agreement, they climbed the hill and asked the man: "Are you looking for stray cattle?" "No," he replied. "Are you looking for a friend?" "No," again. "Are you enjoying the breeze?" "No," yet again. "Then why are you standing here on the hill?" "I am just standing" was the answer. The Zen monk who recorded this story was interested in the state of mind of just being or "thusness" which is not yet confined by any preconception. One who has had the chance to

visit a Korean potter's shed may notice that the wheel used for throwing pots is never exactly true. Sometimes it is so crudely mounted that it is not even horizontal. The asymmetrical nature of Korean pots results in part, therefore, from the uneven movement of the wheel. But we must understand that Koreans do not make such wheels because they like unevenness and dislike evenness. Rather they simply construct their wheels in a happy-go-lucky way. This unevenness, then, is but a natural outcome of the untrammelled state of their minds. They live just as circumstances permit, without any conception of artificiality. Of course if the wheel is canted too much, they may correct it to some extent, but even then it will not be precise. They are scarcely troubled by accuracy or inaccuracy, for in their world these qualities are not yet differentiated. This state of mind is the source from which flows the beauty of Korean pots. Why did our tea-masters, men of keen eyes, prefer Korean pots to all others? The asymmetrical beauty, free from all pretension, was immensely attractive to their aesthetic eyes. They so ardently loved to gaze upon those Korean pots that they finally tried to analyze the beauty expressed in them. They enumerated ten virtues as the elements of which their beauty consisted. It is quite remarkable that the eyes of our tea-masters penetrated so deeply into the beauty of these pots. Paradoxically however, their very analysis initiated the history of an erroneous attitude which has poisoned nearly all the later tea-potters in Japan. They imagined that they could make good pots by isolating the indispensable elements of beauty which characterized Korean tea utensils. But what was the result? In spite of their careful craftsmanship and passionate love of beauty, their analytical self-consciousness has never been able to produce pots as beautiful as the original Korean ware. Why? The reason is obvious: they did not understand that the Korean pots were not the result of intellectual analysis but of a natural and spontaneous condition of the mind. If our tea-masters had told the Korean potters about the ten virtues, the Koreans would not have known what to say. The Koreans simply made pots, while the Japanese proceeded from thought to action. We have made nice things, but they are different. We proceed upon a conscious differentiation of the beautiful and the ugly, while the Korean's work is done before such differentiation takes place. Which is better? I do not say that the

analytical approach is useless, but if we are confined by analysis, we cannot be assured of producing pots of indescribable beauty. Why is it that self-conscious potters cannot make beautiful pots with ease? Because it is extremely hard for them to make things in that state of mind described by Buddhists as "thusness". Once there was a Buddhist devotee named Genza. Though an illiterate peasant, he was actually an enlightened man. He had a friend named Naoji. Attaining together the age of nearly ninety years, both fell ill and took to bed. Naoji, realizing that the end was at hand, began to be anxious about his death, for he wanted to die peacefully. So he sent his niece to his friend Genza to inquire how one may die with a peaceful mind. Genza replied simply, "Just die." A week later, it is said, both of them died peacefully. His answer is magnificent. If anyone can just die, what problem remains? Death is powerless to trouble a man if he can just die. But it is difficult for most men to die in peace, for they do not want to die or they think they should not die yet or they fear the unknown or pity themselves. Some even commit suicide. All troubles, anxieties, agonies come from attachment to life and from ignorance of the meaning of death. If we can escape the dualistic conception of life and death we can just live and we can just die at any moment and in any place without anxiety. This state of mind is called "Buddhahood attained" or "Enlightenment". All beautiful crafts are nothing more than the expression of attained Buddhahood. Enlightenment means liberation from all duality. If we want to make a truly beautiful object, we must before all else reach this state of mind which is free. In comparison to this radical condition, degree of skill, depth of knowledge, even the quality of materials are secondary considerations. This is the utter simple truth implicit in every Santo or Retablo painted by those Mexican devotees of the humble mind. Of course it is far better to have good training, knowledge, and well chosen materials, but the one absolutely indispensable thing is the attainment of that state of mind which is free from all dualistic fetters. If this one condition is lacking, all skill, knowledge and materials will be wasted.

VERSES TO KENZAN-1970

Today I have made a pot.

Long have I yearned and
worked to give myself to the clay in
love and freedom, and my striving has
granted me a beingness with that soil

..... today.

I have made a bowl.....I have lifted
my belly to the universe in unfolding
supplication and spread my body, to
pray with an open face to the sky.....

I have made a vase and been filled
with the swelling one note music of
creation, and made big with the child
of my visions, and I have been small
at the top to hold that in.

I have made a cup and prepared to
drink from the waters of life,
and the fountain was not empty.

I have made.....to myself.
 for myself.
 with myself.
 and I have lost myself

to find me

Today I made a pot.

Shirly J. Coan

KOOTENAY SCHOOL OF ART

K.S.A. came into existence as a full day school in 1960 in a small building on the main street of Nelson. Two familiar names on staff in the early days were Zeljko Kujundzic and Santo Mignosa. The first years saw a small enrolment and, I expect, great creative involvement because of a small student, teacher ratio. In 1964, students, teachers and equipment moved in and became a part of the Vocational School. Number of pupils - 12. Since that time the Art Department has grown steadily until today there are 100 full time diploma students, 75 university students and a staff of 7. Three programs are offered. First, there is a 10 month Commercial Art Program which is somewhat of a crash course in Graphic Arts. Because this is a short course, many of the students are able to obtain financial help through Canada Manpower. Also offered are a Three Year Fine Arts course, and beginning this year, in co-operation with Notre Dame University, a B.F.A. degree program plus art education courses.

For those interested in Pottery, everyone must first take a One Year foundation course. This has proven especially frustrating to the student who wants instant commitment. However, in the second and third year, there are less compulsory subjects and more time can be spent on clay development.

The department is run with as much freedom as possible, with each student working out his own program. All manner of experimentation is encouraged; painted pots, screened pots, enamelled pots. Most emphasis is placed on wheel thrown stoneware. In spite of the fact that a pupil might have a contemporary bent, repetitive techniques such as throwing off the hump, are cultivated to prepare him for a studio production environment.

This year there are 80 students taking Pottery as a part of the foundation course and 18 majors.

The school has one 24 cu.ft. Alpine gas kiln, one 14 cu.ft., and two 6 cu.ft. electric kilns. In addition, last fall, the third year and post-graduate students built a 20 cu.ft. catenary arch wood burning kiln. Each year this kiln will be broken down and

rebuilt as a third year project. We plan to try different designs and various fuels. Also there is a beat-up outdoor Raku kiln which needs repair every spring.

The wood burner mentioned above is worth some comment. I have had a fair amount of experience with different types of kilns, but this is my first adventure in wood firing to stoneware temperatures. From the Rhodes kiln book we chose a catenary arched down draft with a double fire box. Except for a few problems and much theorizing over the size of the fire boxes, construction proceeded without difficulty. The kiln was loaded, some pots left unglazed so that flying ash might produce interesting surfaces. Through most of the thirty-six hours of firing it took six people working constantly to keep the temperature climbing. Four chopping and splitting and two stoking. Two volunteers kept the temperature constant through a very chilly night. A cord and a half of wood later, with the cones standing straight, we gave up. After all that time and work, failure sat heavily on us all. However, the next day we were delighted to find the pots at the bottom back had matured and a few were quite successful.

Much was learned from that firing. Soft dry wood split as fine as possible is a must. Hard wood burns too slow. Next time we will split the wood ahead of time so that the kiln is not always one step ahead of us. Occasionally during the firing, the choppers could not keep up with the stokers. The floor will be altered and blocked out at the back to push the flames to the front. The kiln is buried in the snow now but come spring we might try it again.

The isolation of the school is a disadvantage in some ways; most notably, the difficulty of travelling the many miles to Vancouver or Calgary to see important shows. To alleviate this problem, field trips are arranged each term. Last year a group of senior potters journeyed to Vancouver to see the "Canadian Ceramics" exhibition and a most successful visit to Tam Irving's studio. This year we plan to call on a number of studios in the Okanagan.

Most of the pottery activity in the Kootenays revolves around the school as there are no full time studio potters in the area and very few amateurs. In line with a general trend which is bringing many young people out of the cities to homestead, a number of students have stated a desire to live and work here after graduation. The community certainly needs them and it is not a bad place to live. From the big city standpoint, it may not be exactly where the action is but as one graduate said to me, "nobody hassles you here if your hair is a little long".

Walter Dexter

CERAMICS AND THE TEACHER - ONE VIEW!

How can a teacher best help a student to prepare himself to teach ceramics? First, realize and accept the fact that a person does not finish university possessing the depth of knowledge, the wealth of experience or the highly polished skills that he will have attained through experience during the years after graduation. Second, within any given class of students there will be almost as many levels of development and degrees of interest as there are students in the course. And third, though each student has verbally committed himself to some area of the teaching profession all will vary greatly in intensity in terms of their desire to teach. Consequently it is essential to design a flexible program. This program must provide the opportunity to develop the basic skills of the potter. It must also provide stimulation which causes the emphasis to be placed on each student to develop his own ideas. A student should have the freedom to develop and increase his sensitivity not only to the materials of the potter, but to the many related areas such as social studies, sciences and other forms of the expressive arts. The spectrum of ceramics is broad and a program developed for teachers should include many parts of that spectrum.

In an era which manages to excuse lack of self-discipline with a few short words such as "that's not my bag" or "I'm doing my own thing" it is easy to find yourself as a teacher straddling a

great chasm. On the one hand you are indeed interested in stimulating the imagination of each student in the studio - and on the other hand, you feel a degree of responsibility to those children who will be taught by the new generation of teachers. That responsibility seems to me to be related to helping each student to see the need for acquiring the self-discipline necessary to develop the mechanical skills of working on the potters wheel. For, how many hundreds of times must a person repeat the process to develop just the basic skills of throwing? Hopefully, students will get enough enjoyment out of the process to keep driving until the skill is mastered. However, while this process is in action, I feel students should be encouraged to find ways of making statements in abstract terms with clay. For many this will be something they must learn and it is something which I feel can be learned as most people are able to express ideas in writing - some by drawing - and it is really just a transferring of the same thought process into clay. Once again I find myself straddling the chasm. This time the age-old association of pottery with useful items only is what forms the gap. How many pottery courses seem to get bogged down with the ashtray syndrome? In my estimation far too many experiences with clay in the elementary schools are limited to animal figures or ashtrays. Of course I like useful pottery but I have a tendency to want a useful piece to be suited to its particular use and I find some degree of skill is generally necessary to produce such pieces. So while waiting patiently for that skill to develop why not work toward expressing something of the individual? This can be done so well through the various modes of handbuilding and I find by raising handbuilding to the level of ideas, students come to look at the possibilities of handbuilding to be more varied than skills of the wheel. For teachers this is desirable when we consider the numbers of children in schools that do not possess the potters wheel. Actually, once a student is convinced that handbuilding is not just for the unskilled they begin working on a much larger scale and then the real learning about clay begins. Hopefully, by putting a very strong emphasis on expression of individual ideas, the new generation will be better prepared to cope with and help foster the imaginations of the children they spend so much time with.

To the beginner in ceramics, the technical aspects can be overwhelming, particularly to those convinced that they cannot understand chemistry. Because it is important to know about basic materials, I begin this aspect of my course with simple experiments, involving one material at a time. After they fire many of the raw materials in small test saucers, the students begin reading and comparing materials. Understanding a flux is quite simple when you can see a pile of powder smooth out into a glassy coating over the clay. And by the same token when a pile of powder remains a pile of powder it is easy to see why the flux is necessary. At this point then, students begin to combine two ingredients and, depending on the results and what they glean from their observation and reading, three or four other materials might be added for later testing. Somewhere along the line a few students will get on to the limit formula and go crazy calculating this and that via the limits suggested. Meanwhile there are those who prefer to continue to experiment and I do not discourage this for if the student looks carefully at each test made, a great deal can be learned that will be of value if and when he gets the chemistry craze. No doubt some will complete the course without putting pencil to paper but what does it matter if they have learned to understand the materials and are able to develop new glazes by another method?

Experimental work is carried on with clays as well. Though we use a standard body for work in the studio for reasons of space, ease of operation etc., it is necessary for a teacher to know how to arrive at a body for a specific purpose. Of course this could be learned when the need arose, but why not take advantage of the variety of clays that are available in a medium-size studio operation for learning.

Students must also demonstrate a theoretical and practical understanding of the firing process. They must gain a respect for a kiln and learn its limitations and potentials. It is difficult to understand how a person could consider himself a potter if he has not involved himself in the total process - and that includes the fire. Aside from the total process aspect of firing, it is essential that those going into the schools know how to operate and

maintain expensive equipment. How often does a school purchase a kiln only to have it nearly melted by a careless or unknowledgeable teacher? Again, because of the variety of kilns available, it is desirable if the experiences can be varied. On that spectrum are those methods of firing which do not call for expensive equipment. When one commits a pot to the bonfire it doesn't take long to learn the finesse of firing. Talk about the damper and draft all you want but until a student builds a small brick kiln that doesn't draw, draft is something those over eighteen years of age avoid. Techniques aside for a moment, these opportunities provide a way of doing pottery which makes it possible for the poorest budget and therefore has much potential in schools.

There is one other aspect of teacher preparation which I would mention for I think it is of utmost importance - namely, integrating those aspects of ceramics which so naturally are a part of a child's study in science, social studies and the expressive arts just to mention a few. Can anyone interested in pottery visualize a more exciting project for a group of children than their experimenting with earthy raw materials - mixing them together and heating them in a kiln or bonfire and later examining them when they've cooled? Does that sound more stimulating for young or old than passing pictures of rocks called quartz or any other name so familiar to the potter around the room? Or what about finding a new interest in history when a child discovers that some present day peoples are still firing their pottery the way it was fired by the ancients? And after that discovery why not go outdoors and try to fire your pieces the same way? Every child gets the opportunity to write stories and poems from the time he can write words. Maybe he would enjoy putting the same idea into clay and quite possibly, if given the opportunity to do just that, his idea may become clarified and end a better piece of writing as well. This creative experimenting is vital! Without it that marvellous imagination of the pre-schooler is stifled by age ten. How I would enjoy seeing clay being used in the classroom of and for itself, related to as many aspects of life and the world around us as the most sensitive teacher and students can discover.

Jean Marie Weakland
Art Education
Faculty of Education, U.B.C.

Excerpts from

"A Verbal Mosaic Pertaining to Art Education at U.B.C.
by R.C. Steele, Graphics.

A fact to be observed in any kindergarten over a reasonable period is that every young child will use the art materials given to him to create images that are symbolic representations of the world as he experiences it. Two significant points: with rare exception all young children develop this language of symbolic images (often conceptual and emotionally charged) and secondly, scarcely any teaching is required; just loving acceptance. Is this not of central importance to those planning to be art teachers? Franz Cizek, a young art student in Vienna at the turn of the century, thought so. He was so impressed with the drawings in chalk that slum children were making on the sidewalks that he gave up his own career as an artist and spent the rest of his life working with children.

When children in our society reach puberty, they typically become very self-conscious and the symbolic response to experience typical of early childhood comes to an end. There is an understandable demand for more technique and for greater realism as the youngster moves away from his home and identifies himself with the objective world to a greater degree. No longer do whole classes respond enthusiastically to art as a kind of natural response. Motivation becomes more difficult. The exception is those with a special gift and our art programs seem to reflect this in secondary schools where art is no longer thought of as a symbolic language of significance to emotional maturity. Rather it seems to be thought of as a cultural veneer, a pleasant hobby or a codification of important artistic events, an activity for the gifted few rather than an expressive visual language available to all as in kindergarten.

Art teachers must constantly ask the question - is this a natural and inevitable process or is it possible to nurture and extend the joyfully natural approach typical of young children into secondary school and even adulthood. Surely this is the greatest challenge of art education, if art is deemed to be of value.

The art department is philosophically committed to the belief that involvement in one or more of the expressive arts is a broadly humanizing and enriching experience; that such experience provides a necessary balance to a present educational bias favouring rational and linguistic modes of thought, the physical and social sciences; that all children and young people should be involved in the arts throughout school and that all future teachers of whatever subject area should be encouraged to take expressive arts subjects as part of their preparation for teaching.

A most important principle in this department has been that art teachers must first of all be artists. In studio classes only incidental reference is made to classroom technique or methods of teaching. An important question inevitably arises; if one is preparing artists to become art teachers of the young, does this call for the same or a somewhat different approach than the preparation of artists for a lifetime of personal artistic production.

A most significant pattern of teacher education is emerging in the art department. The prospective art teacher is considered to be someone who will probably devote much of his life to teaching. To be a sensitive art teacher, however, he must develop the sensitivities and disciplines of the artist. He must become an artist in the same sense a child is an artist, or an Eskimo carver, but in terms true to his own uniqueness. In the first years, there will be intensive demands made on the student to acquire skills and new visions, but as he moves into more senior years, he will be given more freedom and more responsibility to build the kind of program most suited to him. A faculty sponsor and committee will give him constant help. From the beginning it is very important for the student to develop self-reliance, self-discipline, and breadth of thinking.

Report from

Margaret Lewis, Chairman of the C.A.C.
Crafts Committee.

To obtain more and better craft courses in this area is the aim of the working committee of the Vancouver Community Arts Council.

A start was made by writing to the B.C. Institute of Technology and to the Adult Education Dept. of the Vancouver School Board to ask about the inclusion of additional craft courses.

Whereas the B.C.I.T. has no room at present for such, the expanded plans for Vancouver City College at Langara could include additional craft courses and Dr. Wales, through Mr. Adams, requested suggestions for advisory committee names, suggestions about courses and equipment and sources of information.

A series of meetings was called. At these, craftsmen, teachers, interior designers and others discussed, made suggestions and brought collected information (B.C. Potters "contributed" Dave Lambert, Reg Dixon, Ellen Chamberlain and Jean Marie Weakland).

Sheets of suggestions, lists of resource people and bibliographies relating to several areas of craft interest have been handed in to Mr. Adams and there have been meetings with him and Dr. Wales and Dr. Denholm.

We think the end of our part in this particular project is in sight and see it as a jumping off place for a further effort in the same direction!

Education affects the student most of all and so I asked the students of the Vancouver School of Art for their views on the ideal way to learn.

Potterer vs. Putterer

To me, the ideal learning situation is found in a close "doing, feeling experience" association with a true artist potterer. A potterer being one who lives surrounded by pots (his own but especially others) in an aesthetic atmosphere. This differs from a putterer who looks at things only with one eye and does something else three-quarters of the time.

The closest I have come to this situation was last summer through my relationships with 3 true artist potterers met on a Raku pot trip. The most important thing learnt not being technical pottery

things but things like attitude, ways of living and philosophy towards life. All three were on a different trip but all helped me realise that I desired to be a potterer, not a putterer.

I feel that once this is realised an art school situation is not for the aspiring potterer. I have absolutely no time for the putterers that I continually trip over 5 days a week. I remain only to complete the last of four years that have brought me to where I am now.

Important things

- a productive relationship with a mature artist potter.
- a working, sweating, relaxing, feeling, doing atmosphere in a highly aesthetic atmosphere (like discussions in the tops of prune trees).
- freedom from putterers and freedom from thinking "Damn it's a quarter to ten and the janitor's going to kick me out and it takes two hours to get home".

Wendy Birch

Inspiration may come from meagre or profound origins. For me it can be a walk on the beach, playing with gourds, meaningful criticism, watching a vibrant potter throw, a strong arm and a kind word - or so many other things. Surroundings mean a lot.

In the grey walls at our school pottery, our inspiration cannot come from our environment but must come from the vitality, discoveries and aspirations of those around us. These rooms are certainly not the best place to view and judge pots. A pot taken from the kiln and placed on a counter or shelf has a completely different meaning when placed on a different ground. Be it on grass or on your own table or floor, any pot takes on a brand new life.

My ideal situation would of course start with beautiful surroundings, perhaps a country place but not isolated. Enough room for two or three potters to work and live, to be able to share major equipment and ideas and enough space and privacy for individual fulfilment.

Vancouver School of Art has given me the basics and the chance to find a way of expressing myself in a means that I love - and I am grateful.

But I have much to learn and do!

----- Carol Kurzreiter.

Pottery and Alchemy

The alchemy of working with the four basic elements - earth and water (pot making and glazing) air and fire (kiln firing) is a life's work.

You unravel your education as you go: from someone you meet telling you that hemlock bark ash makes a fantastic speckled glaze at cone 9; a good criticism from your instructor about the fit of your lid on your jar; to meeting potters in Seattle who are on a completely different trip - aesthetically and visually.

All these experiences help you grow. The longer you are involved the more reverence you learn for all the processes. Preparing the clay, collecting ashes and rocks for glazes, kiln building and firing. The more reverence you have, the more love you put into your work and the better your pots turn out.

Ancient alchemists transmitted basic substances into gold the same way the initiate potter is involved in transmitting clay and other earth substances into beautiful pots-objects-gems.

Eileen Halpin Siller

I have been asked to contribute a few thoughts on what I feel would be a good environment in which to learn ceramics.

First I think people are the most important part of any pottery; it's their attitude that influences the general mood of the studio and the resulting work.

Secondly a ceramics studio must have a point of reference and some sort of goal or direction with which one could make a

value judgement, of some sort or another; you just can't make a coherent judgement on a room full of pots made for "Aunt Amy".

Let's face it, if you always see pretentiously serious pots you can't help but having "pretentiously serious people".

Thirdly is space, light, bright and cheery. Well run with a few rules but I think a well run pottery runs itself (just about anyway) with the people revolving in it.

SUMMER SCHOOLS AND WORKSHOPS

The Vancouver Island Summer School of the Arts
by
Doris Farmer Tonkin

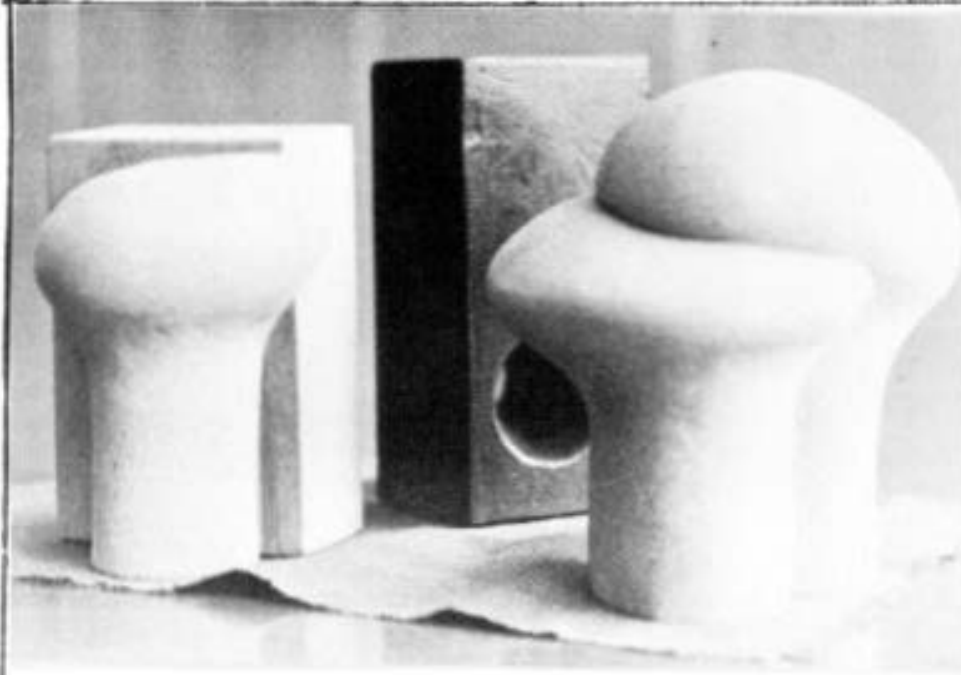
It's going to be different this year. VISSTA, the Courtenay-based Summer School of the Arts, is stream-lining its operations. The same high grade of instruction will be offered, but the courses will be fewer. The School will run from July 6th to 24th under the direction of Mr. Christopher Doman.

History

The sponsoring organization, the Comox Valley Community Arts Society, was formed some seven years ago. Its aim was to establish a summer school of Fine Arts, and a small but dedicated group of people brought this about in 1966. Under the highly competent directorship of Mrs. Beryl Regier, seven courses were offered: Drama, Dance, Pottery, Creative Writing, Painting, Music and Rock Hounding.

Over the years, these basic courses have been added to and subtracted from. No less than fourteen were offered in 1969, but the consensus is that this number spread the enrolment too thin. Hence the plans for this year's reduction.

The school has survived largely on faith, for it is not affiliated with any other institution of learning, but has scraped by on small grants from government agencies - the Community



KOOTENAY
School
of

Art

Ceramic
sculpture

Phillip Leese



suggestions and enquiries to the Vancouver Island Summer School of the Arts, Box 2206, Courtenay, it will be appreciated.

The session will again be held in the aesthetically pleasing, and convenient Georges P. Vanier Senior Secondary School in Sandwick. There has been hostel accommodation for the past two years, and this will again be available.

Future Hopes

The Director of the Summer School and the Community Arts Society are united in the desire to weld the school into a permanent, self-supporting facility for the promotion of art in the Comox Valley. Not only for the many artists and craftsmen of the area, but for those from elsewhere who desire to have their horizons extended by creative pursuits.

HAL RIEGGER will be holding a kiln building class at Handcraft House the last two weeks in June. The students will each design and build their own kiln in any size. He will also be holding a workshop in primitive firing at Ladysmith and Raku workshops at Whonnock and Oyama and will be teaching at Nelson. Anyone interested in more information please contact Gillian Hodge 25249 No.15 Road, RR1, Whonnock.

There is the possibility of a kiln building workshop with Frank Colson. You may have read Mr. Colson's article in "Craftsman/L'Artisan" about the use of Fibrefrax in kilns. He has lately given workshops at World Craft Council meeting, Lima, Peru and Elliot Lake Centre for continuing Education, Elliot Lake, Ontario. If anyone is interested in knowing more about this would they please contact Jean Marie Weakland, 4450 Camosun, Vancouver.

Banff is holding a six weeks ceramic class - no details about instructors.

FIRE AWAY

Jean Marie Weakland has an idea for a new column under this heading. Please send her your ideas, beefs, questions. These items send it off to a good start ... 4450 Camosun St. Vancouver 8.

Some Words of Advice on Building a Kiln

"What you need is more technical books. Books for potters just skim the subject. We need much more technical books."

"It's really very simple. Just make sure your burners and your flue are big enough."

"Seems like an awfully big flue. Are you sure you need it that big?"

"A brick chimney? Oh, great! No fooling around with sewer pipe."

"A brick chimney? Why go to all that work and expense? All you have to do is pile up some sewer pipe."

"Don't build it too big."

"Make sure you don't build it too small."

"Why don't you hire an expert and make sure it's done right?"

"Do it on a co-operative basis. Get everybody to come and help and then you help them when they want to build one."

"Don't worry about that! We'll build it for you. Roger can do the welding and he can get steel for the frame real cheap. Only he can't come this week-end and I can't come next week-end--we'll be there for sure the week-end after next."

"Build a double wall with a one inch space in the middle and fill the space with vermiculite."

"Not vermiculite! It melts at 300 degrees."

"Not vermiculite! It settles down and if a brick moves it flows in to fill the space and you can't push the brick back."

"Air is a good insulator. Why not just leave the space empty?"

"Air? It insulates only in a sealed space. If there's a crack the heat just goes swooshing out!"

"The floor and door pulling out on a dolly? Great! Wonderful!"

"Do you have to have the floor on a dolly? Couldn't you just make it a shape that's easy to load?"

"A cube is the best shape."

"We'll tool the wheels so that they fit exactly on rails made of angle iron."

"I'm doubtful about those tooled wheels. I'd rather see ordinary flanged wheels on railroad type rails."

"The flue under the floor on the dolly? Ingenious! Just make sure the bricks overlap where it joins the flue in the wall - a projection on one that fits into a gap in the other."

"Projection? Fitting in? Oh, don't worry about that! It will be all right just butting."

"Look! This works out perfectly without cutting a brick!"

"But it brings the burner port right against the door."

"Oh, that's all right. Don't worry about that! Just use Mo-flint bricks there."

"Right against the door? You'll burn hell out of your door!"

"The burners opposite each other? Oh, no - stagger them or they fight each other."

"Are you sure he's not just being overly technical? But -!?!
---that means we have to tear all the walls down - again!"

Ruth Meehan

CORRESPONDENCE:

Dear Gillian:

The B.C. Potters' Guild is to be congratulated on its annual show and sale at Hycroft. This event does give the public its only chance to see a cross-section of the work of the Guild members.

Obviously, the conditions are not ideal and these displays must involve much hard work and good will. However, there are one or two factors which, from this viewer's point of view, might be improved.

At present, one must spend such a lot of time searching and handling in order to learn the names of the particular potters and the prices of the pots. Since the crowds are large in that limited space and the display items are very numerous, this process can be both time-consuming and tiring - as well as hazardous to the pottery.

Would it be possible to group all the work of each potter in one general area, with the name and price of each item clearly visible? Price tags may not be aesthetic but are surely important for sale purposes.

Inevitably, the double objectives of a show and a sale demand some compromises. I am sure that any move which would eliminate the necessity to hunt for, pick up, examine and set down again, each and every piece in the show would truly advance the interests of all concerned.

With very best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Oenone Oliver

Dear Potters:

As a follow up to Jan Grove's excellent article on the dangers of lead glazes, and to those of you who are puzzled as to how to determine when or whether 3 milligrams Pb have been dissolved from 100 square centimeters of glaze surface, I would like to suggest that you try leaving a few drops of vinegar in one of your plates or bowls for twenty-four hours. If there is any change in the glaze color or texture you can be sure the vinegar was able to dissolve lead from the glaze. If you use only a little vinegar then the area not covered will serve as a comparison.

Have you ever served salad in one of your bowls and then been puzzled that the glaze seemed strangely different? Watch it!

It is in low-fire earthenware glazes that the danger lies. If the glaze contains several oxides besides lead and you fire to cone 05 or higher you are pretty safe.

A typical example of a dangerous glaze is Leach's Galena which contains only red lead, red clay and iron oxide. Fired to cone 05 there is still plenty of free lead to dissolve in vinegar or any other slightly acid food.

Hoping this helps to make things a little clearer.

Ruth Meechan

BOOKS

Pioneer Pottery... by Michael Cardew.
(Longmans Green & Co.Ltd. 1969)
Foreword by Bernard Leach.

From the Author's Preface

..... I realised that pioneering is not a matter of geography but of the heart It does not necessarily mean doing something where it has never been done before but rather in finding out things for yourself from first principles. It can operate as well in a back yard at home as in remoter places.

This splendid and eminently readable book is an ideal potter's handbook. It covers all phases of the craft from Geology for Potters to Pottery as a Liberal Art. Sixteen appendices deal with special subjects such as clay testing, ball mill operation, glaze and body calculations, thermal expansion, the properties of the elements, a comparative temperature chart and a short bibliography. It is well illustrated with photographs as well as drawings by the author and by Peter Bramfield.

The Art of The Modern Potter by Tony Birks.
120 Photographs by Michael Holdford.
Published by Country Life Ltd., London, 1967.

A beautiful and inspiring book with portraits and capsule biographies of nine well-known English artist potters. 35 of the photographs are in full colour. There are concise notes describing each illustration with reference to the clay body, glaze and firing conditions. It is interesting to note that all these artists are also teachers; some working part time and some almost full time. Three use electric kilns and the others use gas or oil fired kilns.

Johann Polberg

DISTRICT NEWS

Okanagan News

When the spring sun dries the back roads of our valley, Bob Kingsmill and I, Frances Hatfield, will be out prospecting for pottery materials. We have obtained soil survey maps which provide some interesting clues and from time to time we pick up a bit of helpful information from some old timer of the area. It appears that we can expect to find quite a nice range of materials here in the interior. In my case, I hope to rig a grinder in the flume carrying creek water to our orchard, for it runs with considerable speed for about six months of the year. We cannot foresee ourselves gathering all our needs in this way but we do feel that some interesting local materials will add to the actualness of the pots we do here.

If anyone is interested in finding out the locations from us, just drop us a line and we will try to pin-point them on a map for you.

The Kelowna classes of Mary Turk and Frances Hatfield are larger than ever this year and no one welcomes the end of the sessions. Students seem to become more aware and more enthused from year to year.

Frances Hatfield

WALTER DEXTER

Despite modern communications etc., east and west seem every bit as far apart as when Kipling made his famous observations on the subject. British Columbia is a large province with more than its fair share of geographical barriers dividing it into very different areas which perhaps gives us some legitimate excuse for not being very cognizant with events taking place in any but our own specific spot. This is sad. Blame it on the mountains, if you will, but we in the western or northern areas of the province seldom have the pleasure of seeing or obtaining any of the work of one of Canada's best potters - Walter Dexter.

Walter is a native of Alberta. He spent his youth in Calgary during which time he managed to leave the 6 feet mark behind by several inches and to decide on pottery as his vocation, despite the fact that back in 1950 the prospects of earning one's living as a professional potter were not very bright. By 1956 Walter had gained a Fine Arts Diploma (specializing in ceramics) from the Alberta College of Art, had completed an office administration course at Mount Royal College in Calgary and had taught Adult pottery classes for one year at the Alberta College of Art. Then with the aid of a Swedish Gov. Scholarship he was able to complete a year of post graduate study at the Swedish School of Fine Arts and Crafts in Stockholm. Life in Europe was not all serious study and expenses of touring around were solved from time to time by work in a small pottery, a farm and, en route home, in the kitchen sink of a large London Hospital.

Once back in Canada there was employment and experience in the ceramics art studio in Calgary - a commercial studio manufacturing handmade pottery; the Cultural Activities Branch of the Alberta Gov. teaching pottery courses throughout the Province; the Edmonton Potters Guild and Sunburst Ceramics Ltd. as designer and manager. In 1963 Walter settled in B.C. to operate his own studio in Kelowna, supplying retail outlets across Canada, and teaching in his own workshop and the Okanagan Summer School of Arts. The pace proved hectic, allowing little time for experimentation or development of ideas, so before the feeling of turning into a human machine took hold,

26.

the studio was sold (Bob Kingsmill) and in 1967 Walter joined the staff of the Kootenay School of Art as an instructor of pottery, anatomy and drawing.

During his career a number of awards have come his way including the silver medal from the International Ceramics Exhibition in Prague. Over the years too a long list of exhibitions has accumulated. Apart from one man, group shows and travelling shows across Canada, these include the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., the Brussels World Fair, Prague, the Canada-England Exchange exhibit in 1965 and Expo 67. Work is also represented in the permanent collection of the Confederation Art Gallery and Museum of Charlottetown P.E.I. Walter is a sensitive and dedicated artist who believes the key to success is total involvement and while he himself prefers to work with his own interpretation of the successful forms of the past he fully appreciates the new developments and approaches to clay now evolving - his one lament being his wish that "potters would refrain from exhibiting until their work shows some semblance of maturity."

Last year his one man show in Vancouver consisted of a wide variety of pieces clearly demonstrating his ability through a range of shapes and glaze techniques, including enamel on clay, and firing levels from Raku to high fire stoneware. It is to be hoped we will see more of this artist's work - this side of the mountains - in the future.

Pam Hansen

The Editor Regrets . . .

that we had gremlins in the last issue and wishes to thank Gene Barker, Ruth Meachan, Bunny Ramsden and Peter Hodge for stapling, glueing, addressing and licking beyond the call of duty.

And wants to thank Gail Rhys for volunteering to help with advertising for the Western Potter. Anyone wanting to advertise please contact her at: 3005 W.13th Ave., Vancouver, B.C.

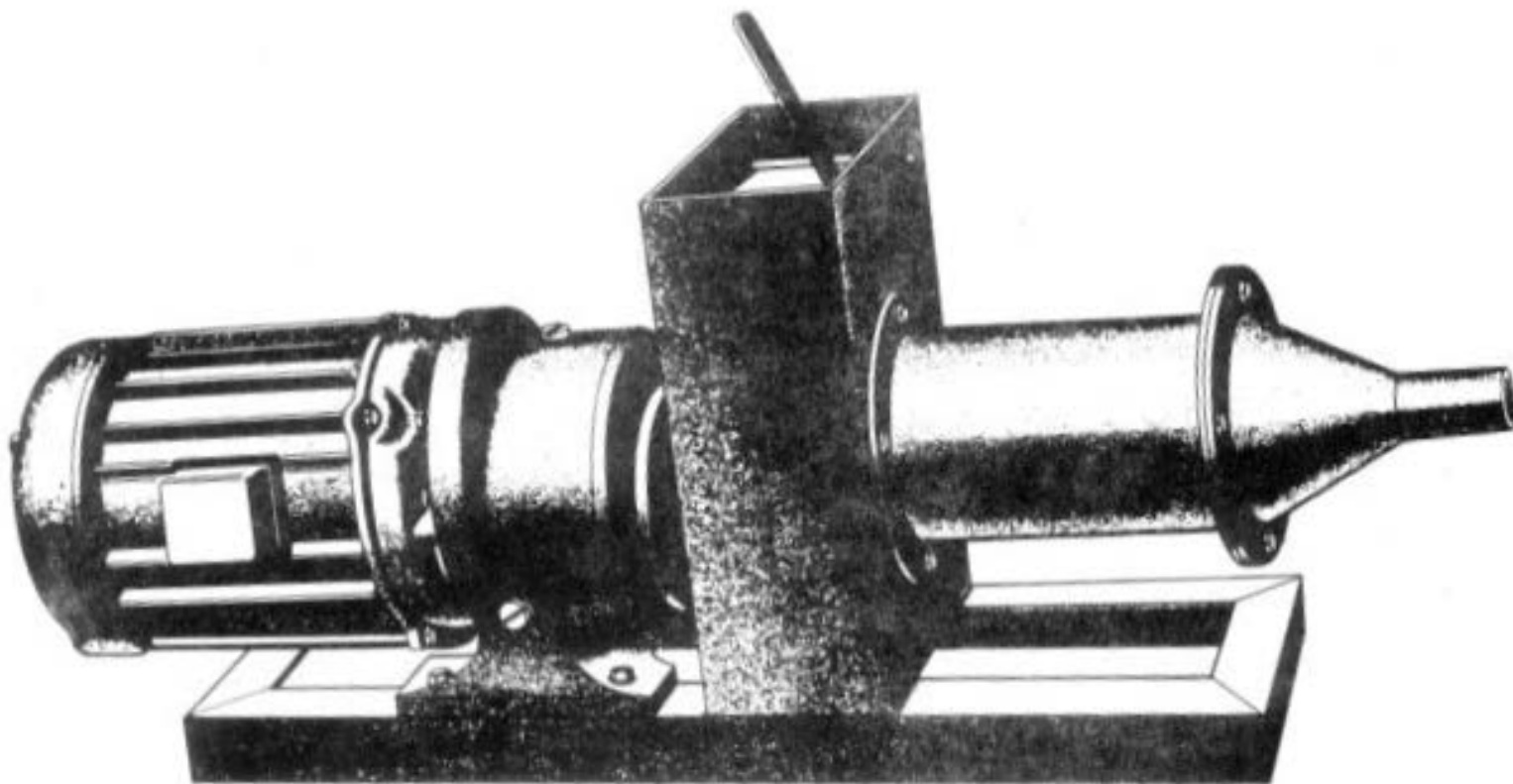
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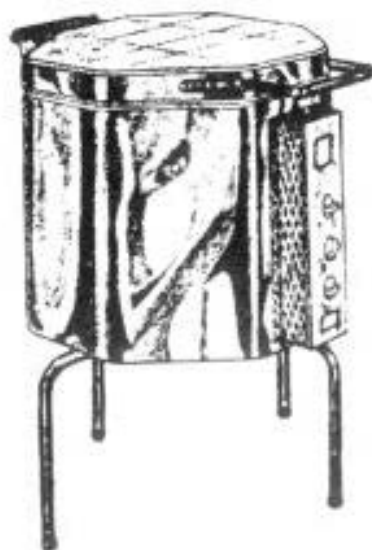
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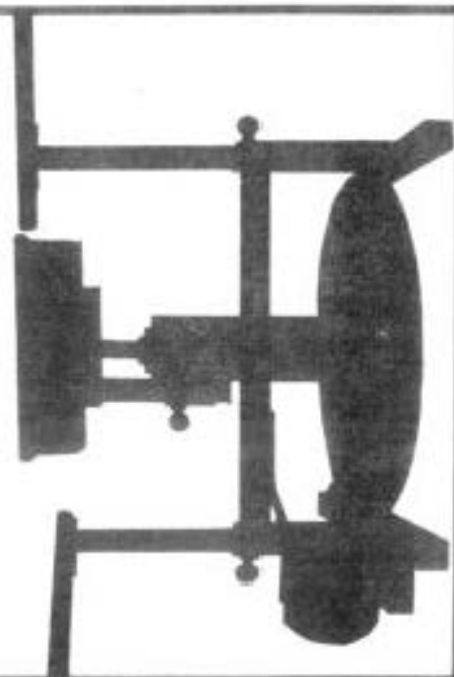
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1. To join together in meetings and discussions for mutual advantage.
2. To promote exhibitions of members' work.
3. To collaborate with other groups of potters and other craftsmen.
4. To endeavour to continue improving the standards of ceramic work.
5. To carry on activities of an artistic, educational or social character for our members.
6. To publish a quarterly magazine, "The WESTERN POTTER".

Past activities have included annual demonstration type workshops by master craftsmen. Lectures and slide and film showings have been organized on a regular basis. For the past two years the Guild has published a quarterly magazine, "The WESTERN POTTER" with the object of educating and informing on matters of interest to potters.

Anyone interested in pottery and ceramics is invited to join the B.C. Potters' Guild.

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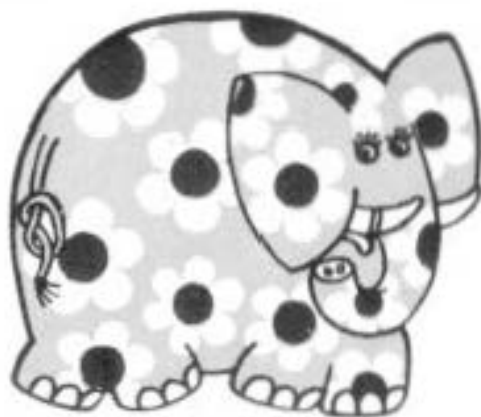
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